



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Dalí/Duchamp

Citation for published version:

Cox, N 2018, 'Dalí/Duchamp', *Burlington magazine*, vol. CLX, no. 1, pp. 51-52.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Burlington magazine

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Dalí and Duchamp

London

by NEIL COX

OCCUPYING FOUR exhibition spaces on the main floor of the **Royal Academy of Arts, London**, the exhibition *Dalí / Duchamp* (to 3rd January; then travelling to the Salvador Dalí Museum, St Petersburg FL; 5th February to 28th May) rethinks the fashionable practice of pairing major figures. Such pairings have been designed to explore historical dialogues, as in *Twombly and Poussin* at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, in 2011, or to map medium-specific exchanges, such as in *Brancusi–Serra* in New York and Basel during the same year.¹ Following the Tate's *Duchamp/Man Ray/Picabia* of 2008,² in which the lead curator of the present show, Dawn Ades, had a hand, the intention at the Royal Academy is not only to point to the surprising bond of friendship between these two apparently contrasting personalities, but also to reveal the common intellectual questions that drove their practices. The four rooms thus partly work thematically rather than chronologically, and are in this way much more complex than first meets the eye. Installed with remarkable sensitivity and largely free of gratuitous design flourishes, the exhibition makes strenuous – and welcome – efforts to circumvent pointless disputes over the priority of artistic inventions, or judgments about which artist is the most important, influential or best.

The occasion for the show is the centenary of Duchamp's most notorious – if rather



21. *Etant donnés 1. la chute d'eau et 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (The waterfall and the illuminating gas), by Marcel Duchamp. 1948–49. Pigment and graphite on leather over plaster with velvet, 50 by 31 cm. (Moderna Museet, Stockholm; © Succession Marcel Duchamp and DACS, London; exh. Royal Academy of Arts, London).



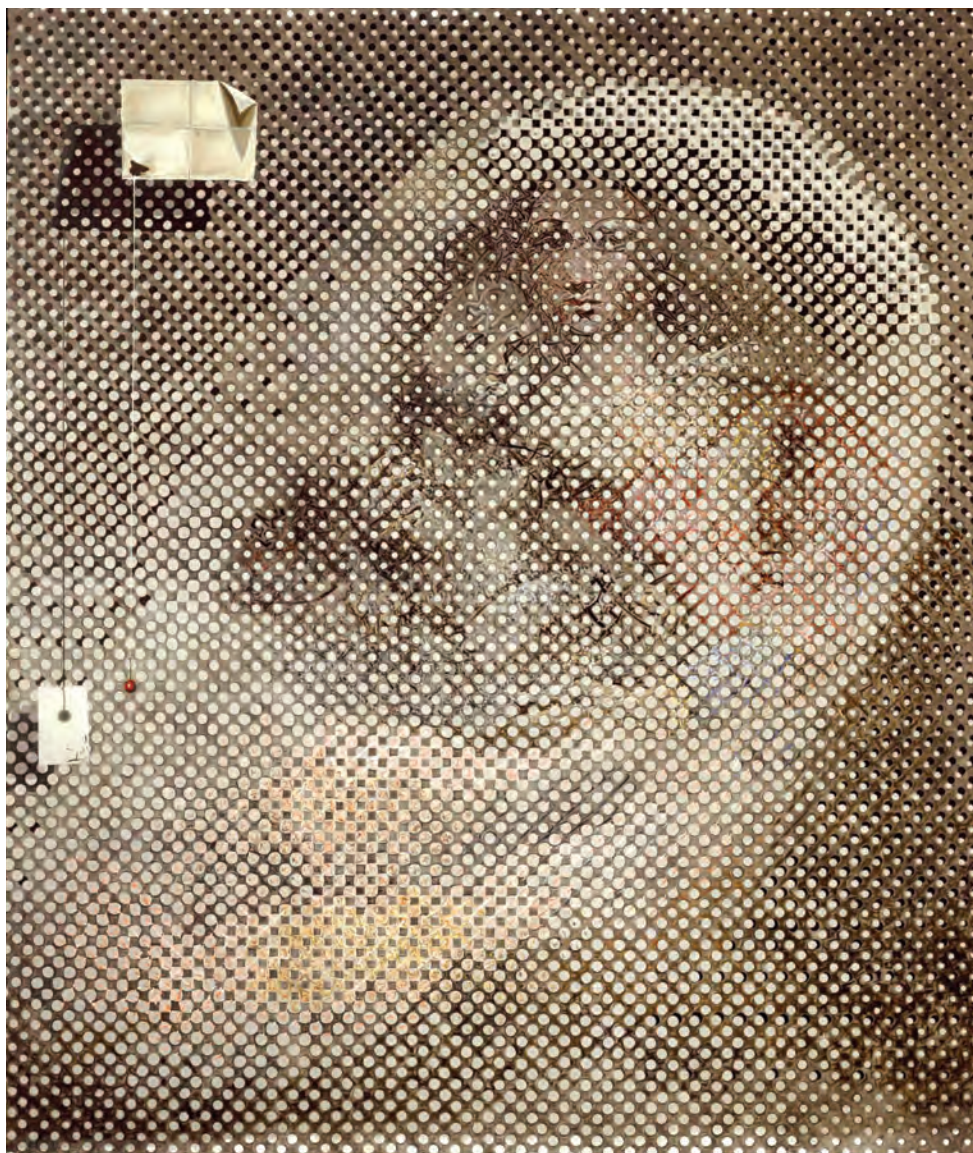
22. *The king and queen surrounded by swift nudes*, by Marcel Duchamp. 1912. Canvas, 126.4 by 140.3 cm. (Philadelphia Museum of Art; © Succession Marcel Duchamp and DACS, London; exh. Royal Academy of Arts, London).

atypical–readymade, *Fountain*. Since the original is lost, it appears here as a 1964 Galleria Schwarz replica (cat. no.248) in what might be regarded as the heart of the exhibition, the second room. Here the visitor is plunged from light to dark to confront a beautifully lit display-case crowded with objects by both artists. The objects are not labelled, but can be identified using a handlist, so the objects can speak for themselves, appearing as Wunderkammer curiosities combined according to arcane logic. Surrounding this very large case are a range of erotic, even pornographic drawings, photographs, paintings and ambiguous things. The theme of the room is not, then, the readymade, but 'The Body and the Object' – and not as two distinct presences, but in their promiscuous exchange. In one corner the various peculiar cast-like objects produced by Duchamp in the 1950s, including *Dart object* (no.66) and *Wedge of chastity* (no.65), rotate slowly on a black velvet turntable. The latter work is separated into its two components (nearly every reproduction and display of the work has it combined), revealing the uncanny flesh pink 'female' form to the faux-bronze 'male' wedge. Neighbouring these is Dalí's phallic *Catalan bread* of 1932 (Dalí Museum, St Petersburg; no.178), groaning with yeasty lust, yet also belaboured by a flaccid clock and ink well.

Making eating metaphorical of – or a fetishistic substitute for – sex is one of Dalí's

obsessions. So, in the same room we find a sequence of amazing drawings prompted by a beach outing to Cap de Creus, on which Dalí and Gala were accompanied by Duchamp and his lover Mary Reynolds among others. Dalí recounts in texts as well as drawings how when going behind a rock to urinate he was seized with erotic fantasy at the sight of Duchamp's sunburnt arm, of Gala, and the smell of barbecuing meat. Masturbating and sucking on a nipple of rock is the reward; these pages from the manuscript 'Je Mange Gala' show Dalí at his most apparently confessional. He knowingly converts such erotomanic reveries into paintings of great intensity, such as *The spectre of sex-appeal* (Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres; no.22), a small work in oil of 1934 set in a vast and elaborate frame, which shows a sailor-suited young Dalí staring up at a monstrous rotting figure set against the lovingly rendered mountainous landscape of Cap de Creus. (The scale of castration anxiety here bears comparison with some of Picasso's monstrous beach creatures of a few years earlier).

One last group in this room deserves a mention: three fragments from Duchamp's major project of his last two decades, known for short as *Etant donnés* (Philadelphia Museum of Art). Here – as throughout the exhibition – are exceptional loans, including the maquette of the naked female body (no.153;



23. *Madonna*, by Salvador Dalí. 1958. Canvas, 225.7 by 191.1 cm. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, and DACS, London; exh. Royal Academy of Arts, London).

Fig.21) featured in the final work from Stockholm. More extraordinarily, however, is a perspex sheet with a white outline of the same figure with small holes drilled through it (no.152), and a large black-and-white photo-montage of the background landscape (no.236), both from a private collection. The status of these two objects is uncertain, and the close inspection afforded by the display only deepens this sense of doubt: the photographic work is in fact collotyped onto cellulose acetate, producing a rayon-like texture and slight sheen, and it is not at all clear how the landscape photographs themselves have been compiled (there is a deception in the tree-line, as if motifs are repeated).

Before one reaches this core moment in the exhibition, the first room, 'Identities', establishes the relationship between the artists and their common path in overcoming their avant-garde apprenticeships. Dalí's exceptional foray in Cubo-Futurism, his *Cubist self-portrait* of 1923 (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; no.212) is upstaged by Duchamp's fine *The king and queen*

surrounded by swift nudes of 1912 (no.53; Fig.22). The difference in dates points to one of the oddities of the relationship between the two artists, so wonderfully documented in a range of holiday snaps. Duchamp's identity as an artist was formed in the pre-war avant-garde of Paris, while the ambitious Dalí operated in a much less coherent cultural moment. Dalí appears for example to adopt something of the 'return to order', and then a preoccupation with tradition in the mid-1920s, as in his oedipal *Portrait of my father* of 1925 (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona; no.25) and the eerie *Basket of bread* of 1926 (Dalí Museum, St Petersburg; no.39). After this, there are some amazing abstract and very large painting-collages by Dalí of around 1928 including *Fishermen in the sun* (Collezione Prada, Milan; no.68). But for all the pull of these great works, it is the small objects in this room that mark out the exhibition's achievement. The original *L.H.O.O.Q.* of 1919 (private collection; no.228), Duchamp's vulgar graffiti transgendering of the *Mona Lisa*, is set alongside variants by Duchamp

and Dalí, as well as postcards and illustrations from journals and articles. Nearby is an example of a *Monte Carlo Bond* of 1924 (no.237), Duchamp's scheme to make money in casinos, and some of those now prescient Man Ray portraits of Duchamp as his female alter-ego, Rrose Sélavy.

The third and largest room of the show is perhaps the hardest to grasp. Its theme is 'Experimenting with Reality', meaning to point to the degree to which both artists were preoccupied in different ways with new scientific ideas or optical devices and technologies, but there are also works featuring religious and other beliefs. Richard Hamilton's reconstruction of *The large glass* (no.93), moved up the road from the Tate, joins the *Three standard stoppages* of 1914 (in a 1964 edition; no.289), three deformed metre rulers with their own modified croquet-mallet box, which were made to use in the *Glass. Network of stoppages* (Museum of Modern Art, New York; no.91) purports to have been made in part using the rulers, though it is a work of such complexity that is hard to be certain whether the rulers really came first. Dalí's scientific preoccupations were more extravagant and his religious iconography ostentatious. His optical experimentation produced *Madonna* (no.119; Fig.23), which appears to anticipate the Ben-Day dot practice of Lichtenstein by some years, and also Warhol's peculiar fascination with photomechanical printing. Offensive to the surrealists, the weird celebration of Raphael and Catholicism now looks knowingly absurd. Maybe a *Dalí / Pop* show is in the offing?

Dalí / Duchamp has a coda in the form of a smaller room exploring the idea of self-representation through books and portable museums, alongside the role that the game of chess played for both artists. At the exit of the show, there is a semi-staging (with photographs, lighting and faux-coalsacks) of the 1938 exhibition of International Surrealism in Paris, which featured a notorious *mise-en-scène* by Duchamp and a red-light row of mannequin stand-ins personalised by the artists, including a notable one by Dalí. This makes for a better ending than the usual tailing off of late works, but the idea is only partly followed through. That said, the publication that accompanies the show is diverse in its different themes and wonderfully realised in terms of illustrations and figures.³ The brevity of the essays works elegantly with the myriad threads at work in this scintillating exhibition.

¹ N. Cullinan, ed.: exh. cat. *Poussin and Twombly*, London (Dulwich Picture Gallery) 2011; and F.T. Bach et al.: exh. cat. *Constantin Brancusi and Richard Serra: A Handbook of Possibilities*, Basel (Fondation Beyeler) and Bilbao (Guggenheim Museum), 2011.

² It was reviewed in this Magazine, 150 (2008), pp.344–46.

³ Catalogue: *Dalí / Duchamp*. Edited by Dawn Ades with contributions from the editor, William Jeffett and Gavin Parkinson. 224 pp. incl. 150 col. ills. (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2017), £15. ISBN 978-1-910350-47-8.